



Session Summary: 11 December 2017

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This third session welcomed Jérôme Soldani, doctor of Anthropology and teaching assistant (ATER) at Paul-Valéry University Montpellier III. His presentation entitled « Entre récits nationaux et histoires locales. Les sports comme lieux d'assignation identitaire et de recomposition sociale des Austronésiens formosans » (“From national narratives to local stories. Sports as venues for identity labelling and social restructuring for Formosan Austronesians”) looks at how indigenous identity is built through sports.

The first part of this presentation focuses on the history of baseball in Taiwan: from when it was introduced by the Japanese, who, for a long time, were the only ones to play it, to the gradual participation of the Taiwanese, including indigenous people, especially through the creation of various baseball teams.

The second part of the presentation focuses on Taiwanese and indigenous representations of baseball, as well as how the role of indigenous people in the sport is viewed. The example of baseball shows how this sport is a venue for social reproduction, for inequality and for discrimination towards indigenous people. However, baseball for indigenous people is equally a venue for forms of adaptation, of strategy and of re-appropriation to escape the norms and values that are imposed by the dominant Han class, to develop their own education and to create their own opportunities for careers their poor conditions do not always allow them to reach.

Baseball is indeed the venue in which both negative and positive stereotypes of indigenous people are reproduced. As they are perfectly aware of the representation which are attached to them and which serve to stigmatize them (amongst which, advantageous physical abilities on the one hand, intellectual deficiencies on the other), they can use these to their advantage to change perceptions. Jérôme Soldani also shows that these stereotypes are assimilated and cultivated by indigenous people themselves (by indigenous trainers in particular), thus indirectly contributing to strengthening these stereotypes and perpetuating the systemic inequality of which indigenous people are victims.

The third part of the presentation focuses on other sport activities that indigenous people organize in festival, ritual or religious contexts, which they have either re-appropriated or reinvented, and which are specific to certain groups. In particular, Jérôme Soldani expands the example of the practice of playing volleyball with two balls, which is typical of the Bunun group. It is considered this ethnic group's signature sport. It is practiced regularly, if not daily, and by everyone (women, men, pastors, all ages and without gender distinction). The use of the two balls makes playing volleyball collective and egalitarian. It thus becomes a reflection of how the Bunun represent themselves, that is as a collective and deeply egalitarian ethnic society, which stands out from other ethnic groups thanks to this. Playing volleyball with two balls becomes an expression and assertion of a unique collective identity.

Through the various sport activities of the different indigenous groups, Jérôme Soldani gives a glimpse of the representations and stereotypes that various ethnic groups have of themselves,



and with which they confront each other. These representations and stereotypes allow them to explain (to themselves) the sport activities specific to each group. Playing sports becomes simultaneously a marker of identity in the extent that it represents a particular feature of a specific group and a sign of differentiation in the extent that how a sport is played allows a group to stand out and become unique compared to other groups.